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ABSTRACT

This newsletter focuses on the results of Safe Schools Program activities funded by the North Carolina Center for Prevention of School Violence and the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction from January 1994 to June 1995. These activities included conflict resolution and peer mediation, coping with anger, crisis response teams, a Continuing Education Incarceration Program (for students in juvenile detention), and diversity training sessions. Additional projects included the development of three model schools to devise strategies which could be useful to schools statewide. Results of these activities and projects included: (1) increases in the number of staff trained to deal with conflicts; (2) assignment of law enforcement officers to schools in order to provide security, hold parent conferences, make classroom presentations, attend school events, and work with formerly incarcerated students as they returned to school; (3) improvement in parents' perceptions of school safety; (4) slight increase in the number of suspensions for violent acts per elementary school student; and (5) stability in the number of violent acts reported. (JW)

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Eye on Evaluation

Evaluation and Research Department
Wake County Public School System, Raleigh, NC

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SAFE SCHOOLS PROGRAM 1994-1995

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BACKGROUND

This newsletter focuses on the results of activities funded through grants from the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (DPI) and the North Carolina Center for Prevention of School Violence (NCCPSV) from January 1994 through June 1995. These grants increased the number of staff and students trained to deal with conflicts and implemented programs in three schools (one elementary, middle, and high school) as possible models for WCPSS and other schools around the state. Reviewing the results of these grant activities can provide valuable ideas about the type of efforts most likely to make a postive difference in the safety of our schools.

RESULTS SUMMARY

1. Most results from the model schools at Lincoln Heights Elementary and Broughton High School were positive, with Zebulon Middle School having more mixed results.
   - Lincoln Heights found staff training in reality therapy, quality leadership, and team building to be essential. They also recommended addressing student needs directly through crisis plans, a conflict resolution elective, a behavior planning room, mentors for 2-6 year olds, high school student tutors, and parent volunteers.
   - Broughton High School reported the most positive aspects of their school-within-a-school model for high risk students to be the greater one-on-one student attention, the reduced course load due to block scheduling, and the weekly trips to the Museaum of Natural Science (where students served as docents once a month).
   - Zebulon Middle School results were less promising. Most staff believed the Students Against Violence Everywhere (S.A.V.E.) groups provided support and information on preventing violence but did not prevent fights. Other schools can learn from their experiences.
2. The number of staff trained to deal with conflicts increased. By June 1995, 65 schools completed Peer Mediation and Conflict Resolution training, 89 schools had training in the Post Traumatic Stress Debriefing Program, and 42 schools provided an Anger Coping Program for at-risk students.
3. Law enforcement officers were assigned to each WCPSS high school. The deputies in this program participated in Safety Resource Officer (SRO) Training. Officers provided law enforcement, made classroom presentations, held parent conferences, attended school events, and worked with incarcerated students as they returned to school.
4. Both parent and staff perceptions of school safety improved from 1993-94 to 1994-95. Little change was seen, however, in the responses to staff survey items related to student threats or fights with teachers or other students.
5. The average number of suspensions for violent acts per student remained the same at high school (0.05) and middle school (0.08) for 1993-94 and 1994-95, and increased slightly for elementary schools, from 0.003 to 0.011.
6. The number of violent acts reported by the WCPSS Safety and Security Department remained fairly stable across the school year, ranging from 202 to 241 incidents per nine week period. There was no change in the number of violent incidents reported from 1993-94 to 1994-95.

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PROGRAM COMPONENTS

CONFLICT RESOLUTION AND PEER MEDIATION

Conflict Resolution and Peer Mediation programs increased the number of students and staff trained to deal with conflict. In 1993-94, 22 schools participated in the training of trainers, school teams, and mediators. Forty-three additional schools participated in this program in 1994-95. Other WCPSS personnel also received Conflict Resolution training, including 800 WCPSS bus drivers. Training focused on the principles of the adult learning theory and change theory and the goals, objectives, activities, and staff development practices common to conflict resolution.

ANGER COPING

Anger Coping was designed to reduce conflict and violence in elementary schools. The focus of the program was the establishment of group rules, use of self-statements to reduce aggression, development of understanding others' points of view, and identifying solutions and consequences for social situations. Forty-two elementary schools participated in the Anger Coping program in 1994-95.

Throughout the year psychologists and counselors worked with at-risk students, helping them learn coping strategies to reduce aggression and increase self-esteem. Psychologists collected diagnostic data on students, and survey data was obtained from their teachers and parents. These confidential data were used to serve students' individual needs.

CRISIS RESPONSE TEAMS

A Post Traumatic Stress Debriefing Program provided services to students and staff who witnessed or were exposed to violent or traumatic events. The debriefing procedures were short-term structured group sessions where individuals identified their emotions, validated their experiences, and reinforced post-trauma coping skills. The program coordinator viewed collaboration with Wake County Mental Health professionals as critical to successful intervention during traumatic events (e.g., student fatalities).

Training in debriefing procedures was completed by the spring of 1995. Introductory training was provided to 133 counselors at 49 elementary, 18 middle, and 12 high schools. Psychologists and social workers also attended the training and 25 psychologists, counselors, and social workers attended advanced Post Traumatic Intervention Training in the Spring of 1995.

LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES

The Wake County Sheriff's Office coordinated a Continuing Education Incarceration Program (CEIP) for incarcerated students. Program activities included interpersonal skills, self-exploration, and personal growth experiences. The Wake County Sheriff's Office transported CEIP students to and from school, coordinated counseling and other agency services for these students, and provided law enforcement officers for each WCPSS high school (two high schools shared an officer). The primary duty of the officers was law enforcement. However, they also made classroom presentations, held parent conferences, assisted school officials, attended school events and PTA meetings, and worked with school personnel.

DIVERSITY ISSUES

WCPSS worked with a consultant, Dr. Forrest Toms, to determine diversity training needs for the system. Surveys and focus groups of WCPSS personnel were done to determine the diversity training needs of the system. The survey sample was stratified by race, gender, and job classification.

Diversity training sessions were held for all principals, assistant principals, and professional level Central Office staff in April and May 1994.

In the spring of 1995, the Board of Education approved a three-year diversity plan. As part of this plan, 40 WCPSS personnel (Central Office staff, school administrators, classroom teachers, and guidance counselors) were identified as Diversity Trainers and received 34 hours of training.

As of May, Diversity Trainers had led diversity sessions in six schools, and led two open-enrollment sessions that were attended by 45 staff members from a variety of schools. It is hoped that all schools can be trained over the next three years.

MODEL SCHOOLS

Three schools received grants to try strategies which might be useful as models for other schools statewide. Each school's Safe Schools efforts actually reflected grant and locally funded activities.

LINCOLN HEIGHTS ELEMENTARY

The goals of Lincoln Heights Elementary's Safe Schools program were to make the school safer for students and staff and to educate parents and community members in conflict resolution and violence-prevention strategies. Program components included:

- Implementing the Better Beginnings Mentor Program, to prevent school failure by providing mentors to increase the language skills of young at-risk students;
- Improving school climate;
- Creating Volunteers IN Education (VINE), a parent-volunteer program aimed at increasing student achievement;
- Increasing staff training in several areas; and
- Securing funds for the High School Tutorial Program, which compensates high school students for tutoring 4th- and 5th-grade students reading two or more years below grade level.

Staff training was an integral part of the components and activities implemented at Lincoln Heights. The training components staff viewed as most essential for success were Reality Therapy training, which explored human motivation; Quality/Leadership training, which focused on distributing leadership skills; Large and Small Group training, which provided personalized learning for staff; and Ropes training, which concentrated on teambuilding.

Components seen as most effective were:

- the Crisis Plan for Targeted Students, which identified high-need students and worked to stabilize them;
- Quality Schools Curriculum, which incorporated cooperative learning, technology, and language processes into instruction to help students acquire critical-thinking and problem-solving skills;
- Ropes course, which increased cooperation, support, and trust among staff and the 5th-grade class;
- Conflict Resolution Elective;
- The Planning Room, which provided students with the opportunity to evaluate their behavior, to understand they were responsible for the choices they made, and to receive support for making more responsible, need-fulfilling choices;
- Better Beginnings Mentor program;
- VINE parent volunteers; and
- the High School Tutorial program.

Outcome data for Lincoln Heights was positive:

- The percentage of staff who reported that Lincoln Heights was a safe place to work *increased* from 72% in 1993-94 to 89% in 1994-95.

- The percentage of parents who reported that Lincoln Heights was a safe place *increased* slightly (1%).
- The percentage of staff indicating that students threatening teachers was a serious problem *decreased* by nearly half, and the percentage of staff indicating students fighting among themselves was a serious problem *decreased* by almost 30%.
- Out-of-school suspensions for violent acts at Lincoln Heights, however, *increased* from zero in 1993-94 to 16 in 1994-95. Suspensions became part of a larger process involving parents, teachers, and students to teach students that violence would not be tolerated in 1994-95. Elementary suspensions increased systemwide.

Zebulon Middle School

Zebulon Middle School was declared a violence-free zone. The theory behind their Safe Schools violence-prevention program was that students who experience success in school are less likely to behave in ways that impede learning for others and themselves. This student-centered model included recognizing and rewarding excellence in academics, attendance, and behavior, and developing students' leadership skills.

Grant-supported components and activities included Students Against Violence Everywhere (S.A.V.E.), an ongoing support system promoting a violence-free climate through structured activities and lessons; peer mediation; restitution training; Saturday School/Anger Management training; parent involvement; and Peer Mediation and Conflict Resolution training for staff, students, and parents.

Program effects for Peer Mediation and S.A.V.E. were not as positive as school staff hoped. The number of Peer Mediations decreased from 54 mediations in 1993-94 to only 17 mediations in 1994-95. This decline may be attributable to the increased focus on S.A.V.E. groups and less emphasis on Peer Meditation in the 1994-95 school year; Peer Mediation will be a greater focus in future years. Problems cited with S.A.V.E. groups were related to leadership, limitations of time frames for group bonding (e.g., meeting times were shortened and sometimes missed), and structure and scheduling changes once the program was in progress. It is uncertain as to what form S.A.V.E will take next year.

Outcome data for Zebulon were mixed:

- Staff survey results revealed that the percentage of staff who reported Zebulon was a safe place to work *increased* from 72% in 1993-94 to 86% in 1994-95.
- The percentage of parents agreeing or strongly agreeing that Zebulon was a safe place to learn *decreased* from 64% in 1993-94 to 57% in 1994-95.
- Discipline referrals for aggressive behavior *decreased* from 47 in the first semester of 1994-95 to 8 during the second semester.
- Out-of-school suspensions for violent acts *increased* from 39 in 1993-94 to 73 in 1994-95.

Broughton High School

Broughton High School, as part of its Safe Schools program, implemented Operation SUCCESS. The program targeted 9th-grade students at risk for violence in order to facilitate their transition into high school and increase their chances of staying in school and out of trouble. Broughton had two major goals when they implemented Operation SUCCESS: to make the school safer for all students and help prevent violence by educating parents and community members in conflict resolution and violence-prevention strategies.

Middle school counselors identified 9th-grade students for the program who were not being

served by other programs, had no court convictions for violent behavior, and who seemed prone to fights or conflict. Of the 26 students placed in the class, 19 completed most of the program. The program incorporated:

- Block scheduling (interdisciplinary teaching and small student-to-teacher ratio) so students were with four core-subject teachers for most of the day;
- Teacher contacts for parents with children in the program;
- Field trips to the NC Museum of Natural Science and the Museum of Natural History, Pullen Park, the state zoo, and others;
- Eight hours of conflict-resolution training; and
- Guidance support sessions focused on improving study habits.

The most successful components of Operation SUCCESS were the small student-to-teacher ratio (two teachers were in the classroom of 24 students), block scheduling, and trips to the Museum of Natural Science where students served as docents to elementary age children. The biggest disappointments were home visits, parent support (attendance was low for three parent meetings), Peer Mediation and Conflict Resolution training (it had little effect), and interdisciplinary teaching (most difficulties arose in English and social studies).

Outcome data for Broughton were mostly positive:

- There was no change in the percentage of staff reporting that Broughton was a safe place to work in 1994-95 (49%).
- The percentage of parents who reported Broughton was a safe place to learn *increased* by 19% in 1994-95 to 65%.
- The percentage of staff who responded there was a serious problem with students who threaten or fight with teachers *decreased* (67% to 64%).
- Out-of-school suspensions for violent acts increased from 64 in 1993-94 to 94 in 1994-95.
- Of the original 26 students, 19 completed most of the SUCCESS program. The 19 students showed improved patterns of attendance, grades, and attitudes towards school.

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